NEW YORK HOUSEWIVES BUYING FOOD AT SIEGE PRICES

Cost of Provisions in Paris During German Bombardment Forty four Years Ago Cheaper Than Food Here To-day

By FRANK H. VIZETELLY.
Managing Editor of the Standard Dictionary.

Dr. Vizetelly lived in France throughout the Franco-Prussian war. Several of the members of his family were locked up in Paris during the siege. One, Edward Vizetelly, served throughcut the war as staff officer with Gen. Garibaldi, and his brother Ernest served their father, the late Henry Vizetelly, then special correspondent of the "Illustrated London News," in the capacity of secretary during the siege. The data given below are derived from official documents of the time.

FIFTEEN days after a white tablecloth fluttered over the citadel of Sedan—Napoleon III.'s token of the surrender of his army to the victorious forces of a united fatherland—the German army began the investment of Paris. By 1 o'clock in the afternoon of September 19 the telegraph wires communicating with Versailles were cut and Paris was left to her doom.

For nearly four months thereafter the isolated city was subjected to a siege by which the Germans hoped to starve it into submission. But, notwithstanding that a rigorous winter had set in and the suffering caused through the scarcity of fuel was intense, notwithstanding the hardships experienced and the privations endured, Paris still held out.

In the meantime the Germans had not been idle. Siege guns that had been sent for were placed at various points of vantage on the heights commanding the city and every preparation made for the bloody duel that was to follow. Summoned once more to surrender, the Government announced its policy to defend the city to the bitter end to citizens of Paris in these terms:

"Rumors have been spread that the Government of National Defence intends to abandon the policy for which it was placed in charge. This policy is expressed in the terms: 'Not an inch of our territory; not a stone of our fortresses.' The Government will maintain this policy to the end."

Then the bombardment began. The first shot was fired on the afternoon of January 5, 1871, and fell in the Rue Lalande. The objective was a clock tower near by, and soon shells began to fall thick and fast in the neighborhood. As night drew on the cannonade became more violent and the range of the hostile artillery expanded. During the first night twenty-six houses were destroyed. Early the next day shot and shell fell continuously, especially in the Latin Quarter, and several persons were killed.

Having ascertained the range of their artillery the Germans thereafter decided on a continuous bombardment at night, hoping thus to terminate the siege speedily. But they were mistaken and compelled to keep up an incessant fire. From sunrise to sunset, from the rising of the moon till its shining splendor was dimmed by the brightness of the day, Herr Krupp's messengers of death sped on their course from the German batteries.

On August 9 the municipality of Paris had turned its attention to provisioning the capital. At this time there were, according to the official return, 293,289 quintals of flour in storage, which, increased by the moderate stock in the bakers' hands, amounted to 30,000 tons, the equivalent of about forty-five days supply. During the latter part of August 200,000 sheep and between 30,000 and 40,000 oxen were herded in the Bois de Boulogne. Thus it had become transformed into a vast cattle range and an immense sheepfold.

On September 11 the Government gave notice that the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce would fix the price at which butcher's meat was to be sold. Dating from September 16 this price, which was if anything below the average rate at which meat was then being sold, remained in force until the stock became exhausted. The prime parts of beef cost 3 francs the kilogramme, or 26 cents the pound avoirdupois; second rate parts 2 francs 10 centimes, or 18 cents per pound; intermediate parts, 1 franc 70 centimes, or 15 cents per pound; inferior parts, 1 franc 30 centimes, or 11 cents per pound.

As to mutton the prime joints were 1 franc 80 centimes the kilogramme, or 16 cents the pound; second rate joints were 1 franc 30 centimes, equal to 11 cents per pound, and the inferior parts 1 franc 10 centimes, or 10 cents per pound. Fresh pork was sold at 2 francs 30 centimes the kilogramme, or 21 cents the pound, and salt pork at 1 franc 80 centimes, or 16 cents the pound. The butchers were required to indicate by written labels placed on the meat itself the particular cut, and to display the official decree fixing the price at which the different cuts were to be sold in some conspicuous part of their stores.

Remember, these prices are French prices forty-four years ago. We live at siege prices in New York to-day.

At first many of the butchers refused to sell their meat at the prices indicated, and National Guards had to be constantly summoned to enforce the regulation.

As to bread a fixed price for this was not decreed until four days after Paris was invested. Then the price was set at 45 centimes and 38 centimes the kilogramme, or about 4½ cents and 3 cents the pound avoirdupois for the first and second grades.

The stock of flour belonging to the Government and in the hands of the municipal authorities on the 20th of September, the day following the investment, amounted to upward of 292,000 quintals; the stock in the hands of the trade at the same period was set down at about 155,000 quintals, giving a total of fully 447,000 quintals, equal to about 44,000 tons. Allowing for an ordinary rate of consumption—7,000 quintals per day—it might be calculated that there was ample flour to last for ten weeks, or to the end of November.

Copyright American Press Association.

Reducing high cost of living caused by European conflict. Shoppers at an open air municipal market at Fort Lee Ferry, New York.

In addition, between the public stores and the dealers there was a stock of something like 100,000 quintals of wheat, which, if it could be ground in Paris, would extend the supply of flour until the middle of December. In addition there were 150,000 quintals of rice.

On September 24, five days after the capital was invested, there were in round numbers 150,000 sheep, 24,600 oxen and 6,000 pigs within the walls, which, according to the report, were then being well cared for and picking up flesh. The average daily consumption was at the rate of 935 oxen, 4,680 sheep and 570 pigs.

Scarcely had the investment been completed than it became evident that Paris must take a lesson in practical economy. The city was without game and without fish—save salted cod, red herrings and a few gudgeon caught in the Seine—had hardly any poultry, no rare vegetables, and neither cheese nor butter, on which the French cuisine so largely depends.

On September 28 the Government took a second measure of precaution, limiting the supply as well as the price of meat. It resolved that the maximum number of animals to be killed daily should not exceed 500 oxen and 4,000 sheep. Crowds assembled outside the butchers' shops, long before their hour of opening had arrived, with the view of securing some portion of the meat on sale before it was all gone. These cues, which continued throughout the investment, soon constituted one of the most characteristic inner life features of the siege.

They were first formed in the more populous and poorer districts, but before a couple of days had spread to the most aristocratic quarters of the capital. Originally they commenced about 5 A. M. in front of the iron railings that invariably shut in the Parisian butcher's shop, much as they form at the Metropolitan Opera House or the Polo Grounds when Mary Garden or Matty the pitcher is in the public eye.

The rationing was effected on an almost uniform plan throughout Paris. Each family had to apply for a meal ticket and specify in writing the number of persons in the family. This statement was verified, and if found correct a meal ticket was issued at once. On some of these the days of the month were printed, being obliterated in turn when the rations were purchased, while other cards were provided with detachable coupons.

But so defectively was the rationing organized in some parts of Paris that the correspondent of a London newspaper was unable to obtain a morsel of meat for himself or his family during ten successive days, although the different members of his household repeatedly relayed each other in waiting outside the butcher's shop. By a strange fatality the meat was always gone when his turn to be served came around. Therefore, the family had to live on ham, rice and sardines for ten days; when one morning he espied the grating of a butcher's shop in the Rue Lafayette still open, and a few pieces of mutton hanging from the hooks.

Unfortunately he was without his ration ticket, and while a friend ran home to fetch it the Gardes Civiques, whom he had acquainted with his position, coolly divided the remaining joints among themselves, and on the arrival of the ration ticket informed him that all the meat was gone. He complained of this conduct at the head office of the Garde Civique, and on being told that he must have made a mistake, as such a thing was quite impossible, he retaliated by exclaiming that according to the official reports there were as many rations furnished to the butchers as there were mouths to feed in the arrondissement; that as he had had no meat during ten successive days some one must have eaten his share, and that from what he had seen he was positive it had fallen into the hands of the very people who were placed there to represent "equality and fraternity." It was all to little purpose and he had to trust to better luck as the days wore on.

The difficulty experienced in obtaining either beef or mutton gave impetus to the consumption of horse flesh. There were at the beginning of October twenty-six shops in Paris where horse flesh was sold exclusively. Soon the Government issued a decree establishing a maximum price at which horse meat should be sold. This was originally fixed (October 7) at 1 franc 40 centimes the kilogramme for the best parts and 80 centimes for the inferior portions, but a subsequent ministerial decree (October 15) authorized the sale of filet and false filet of horse at 17 cents per pound. The number of horses to be killed per diem was restricted to 600.

One of the successes of the hour was ass's flesh—a kind of veal with a poultry flavor, looking peculiarly white and tempting, and sold at the rate of 58 cents a pound. The restaurants had to rely on horse and mule and donkey flesh in composing their menus.

At some establishments strangers were politely informed that dinners were only served to the regular clientele who had handed over their ration cards to the proprietor. On patronizing one of the "prix fixe" establishments, such as the "Diner de Paris" and the like, the following was the style of menu submitted to your choice:

Hors d'œuvres—Sardines a l'huile, saucisson de Lyon (ass or horse, but commonly understood to be the former), boudin de table arille, and boudin noir et blanc (horse).

Potages—Vermicelle, consomme, pate d'Italie (the bouillon or stock being of course made of horseflesh).

Poisson—Morue salee, harengs saurs.

Entrees—Pieds de mouton poulette, foie saute Lyonnaise, rognons sautes (bullock's or horse's liver, repeated in another form), bœuf a la Bourgogne (horseflesh), bœuf fume facon Hambourg (ditto), cœurs de mouton au rix, cotelettes de porc sale, filet de mulet a la reine d'Espagne, tripe a la mode de Caen.

Rotis—Anon roti (juvenile donkey).

Volaille—None.

Gibier—None.

Legumes—Salsifis frits, choux, pommes de terre sautes (soon became very scarce).

Entremets—Beignets soufflés, gelees aux fruits.

Dessert—Noix, noisettes.

Fromage—None.

The only fish brought to market came from the Seine, and was naturally much sought after. A small dish of gudgeon mixed with bleak, suitable for two persons of very small appetites, could not be had under 40 cents, while a fine Seine eel realized $3.

As to poultry—none of which was in good condition—live geese sold wholesale at $3.25 per head; fowls and ducks ranged from $1.50 to $2 each, turkeys fetched $6 apiece, rabbits $1.25 to $1.50, and pigeons 50 cents apiece. Now and then in the course of one's rambles through the city one came upon a cheesemonger's shop still open, where 40 cents a pound was asked for gruyere, and 50 cents for common English or American cheese. But remember this was in France forty-four years ago.

It was not merely horse that Paris was prepared to devour. All the animals of the Jardin d'Acclimatation, and even such of those from the Jardin des Plantes as were pronounced fit for human food, were sent to the slaughter houses, and a butcher on the Boulevard Haussmann created quite a sensation by displaying for sale several bears, buffaloes and bisons, yaks and kangaroos, to say nothing of ostriches, cassowaries and other members of the feathered tribe. Only millionaires could afford to purchase these and such other more or less succulent specimens of game as camel's hump and elephant steak, owing to the fancy prices at which they were sold.

Still people of moderate means were not without a certain class of game at their disposal, for a salmi of a couple of rats could be had at several restaurants for a franc and a half or two francs. A rat market which had been established on the Place de l'Hotel de Ville, under the very nose of the Government, was plentifully provided with the raw material by a number of rat catchers who obtained admission into the sewers and baited their traps with glucose, to which the rats, which live in thousands in the Paris drains, proved particularly partial.

Monkey, grilled or stewed, made another succulent dish, but one beyond the reach of the pocket of the middle class. It was the "Besieged Resident," Henry Labouchere, who shared the pangs of hunger, fed with "elephant, cold donkey, cats, dogs and rats," about which his biographer says he was "surprised there is not a society for the promotion of eating rats."

The Parisians were also constrained to devour man's best friend, his dog, as well as his favorite feline pet, the cat. The last named at least was no new addition to the Parisian cuisine, for even in the palmiest days poor pussy served as a substitute for jugged hare.

A poor woman was detected stealing out of a house with a fine cat hidden under her shawl.

"Oh, pray, do not expose me," she cried in a plaintive voice; "it is for a poor sick friend," and indeed people in ill health might partake of far less tender and succulent meats.

A husband and wife of the bourgeois class had a little dog of which they were very fond. But the day came when there was nothing to eat in the house and poor Bijou had to be killed and cooked. His master and mistress sat down to dinner with tears in their eyes and during the meal the latter mechanically placed the tiny rib bones on the side of her plate.

"Poor Bijou!" she said with a sigh, "what a treat he would have had!"

Less melancholy is the story told of the English journalist who went with a friend to breakfast at Brebant's. The bill of fare included "sucking pig," for which he had always had an especial weakness. He gave his order with misgivings as to the genuine character of this particular sucking pig, so he called back the waiter and asked him if it was a real sucking pig.

"Certainly!" replied the waiter.

"A little pig?" inquired the Englishman.

"Surely," quoth the garcon.

"A young pig?" persisted the customer.

This was too much for the waiter, who finally admitted that it was a guineapig. Stewed guineapig proved to be really delicious.

Toward the close of November such salt provisions as the Government had in stock made their appearance—their distribution alternating with that of the rations of fresh meat. It was believed at the time that vast quantities of salted provisions were in the hands of the authorities, but in reality there was not sufficient to have fed the entire population for ten successive days. By the end of November at Vefour's restaurant in the Palais Royal a slice of game pie (nature of game not specified, but easily imagined) cost 40 cents and truffled sausages 18 cents each.

By this time the sufferings of the besieged had become so intense that the force of hope and patience could no further go. People had now to form queues and wait during long hours, at times in muddy snow or under a shower of heavy rain, for meat, bread, wood, chocolate—indeed, for well nigh every necessity of life. Nearly one's whole day and one's whole strength were exhausted by all this tedious waiting, which besides killing numerous inhabitants (some few suddenly dropping down and dying on the spot) had sown the seeds of disease in many thousands more.

The constant increase in the death rate was indeed appalling. During the week ending January 7 3,680 people died from disease; during the following week 3,982 deaths were registered; while from January 14 to January 20 the mortality from natural causes was no less than 4,465. The privations of the hour were of course especially trying to the very young, to the aged, to mothers nursing, to the sick and the wounded; and among these categories the mortality was particularly great.

The food question was indeed all paramount; bread constituted in this instance the true sinews of war. There were frequent disturbances outside the bakers' shops, for, despite the scanty allowance of 300 grammes per head per diem, it continually happened that the bakers could not supply even this beggarly pittance to their customers. To compensate in a measure for the limitation of the bread allowance it was determined that one-fifth of a liter of wine should be distributed gratuitously at each baker's shop to every needy person presenting an order for bread.

At the Government Council held on the 23d of January the food committee announced that there were only 20,000 horses left, while M. Magnin had in stock only 16,000 metric quintals of wheat, 9,000 quintals of rice, 23,000 of oats and 53,000 of various other grains. The oats, although in considerable quantities, could only be partially utilized, for they required to be mixed with wheaten flour, and of this there was merely sufficient for five days requirements. But rumors of surrender were already in the air.

By March the first the end had come! "So long as I have a barrel of gun powder and a loaf of bread I will not surrender!" once cried the commander of a beleaguered citadel. Paris had powder left, but she had no more bread. The Queen of Cities bowed her head in presence of a victorious foe.

The whole world had followed with respectful wonder the progress of the siege and now that the fall approached the general interest and attention increased. It was such a fall! There was nothing like it in the history of sieges; for, as a writer of the epoch remarked, "the capture of Constantinople by the Mohammedans fades into insignificance when compared with the beleaguerment and the doom of the Queen of Cities, the most beautiful of capitals, the centre of European culture and the Mecca of luxury for all the world."

The German troops entered the city on March 1 and encamped in the Champs Elysees. Three days later, with light hearts and conscious of having efficiently discharged a disagreeable duty, they turned their faces toward the fatherland.

How French Authorities Regulated and Enforced Sale of Foodstuffs During Months of Investment---Styles of Menus

American Refugees in Switzerland Obtaining Emergency Passports

Consular Agent Frazer issuing emergency passports to Americans in Lausanne. Mr. Frazer sat for four days and granted 514 passports, good for one year.